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SECRETARY OF DEFENSE WILLIAM J. PERRY
PRESS CONFERENCE, WITH MINISTER OF DEFENSE GERASSIMOS ARSENIS
GREEK DEFENSE MINISTRY, ATHENS, GREECE
JULY 20, 1994

MINISTER ARSENIS: THE TALKS WE STARTED YESTERDAY WITH THE U.S. SECRETARY OF DEFENSE AND HIS STAFF WERE COMPLETED A WHILE AGO. I THINK THE DISCUSSIONS WERE ESPECIALLY IMPORTANT. DURING THESE DISCUSSIONS WE FOCUSED OUR ATTENTION ON THE CURRENT CRISIS IN BOSNIA, AND GIVEN THIS OPPORTUNITY, WE EXAMINED THE CURRENT PROBLEMS IN THE BALKAN PENINSULA, AS WELL AS THE PROSPECTS FOR THE BALKANS IN THE LONG TERM. WE HAD A VERY USEFUL EXCHANGE OF VIEWS ON THE ISSUE OF BOSNIA AND WE EXAMINED THE ROLE THAT OUR COUNTRIES CAN PLAY, UNDER DIFFERENT SCENARIOS, IN BOSNIA'S CURRENT CRISIS. BUT, MORE IMPORTANTLY, WE DISCUSSED THE ISSUE OF NATO'S EVOLUTION AS AN ORGANIZATION FOR THE SUPPORT OF PEACE OPERATIONS, AND THE NEED TO UPGRADE ITS ROLE IN SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE AND THE BALKANS.

IN THIS FRAME, GREECE CAN AND MUST PLAY AN UPGRADED ROLE AND WE DISCUSSED SPECIFIC VIEWS FOR COOPERATION BETWEEN GREECE AND THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA IN THE CONTEXT OF THE PLAN 'PARTNERSHIP FOR PEACE.' WE AGREED IN HOLDING CONTACTS BETWEEN THE TWO STAFFS OF OUR COUNTRIES TO WORK OUT SPECIFIC ACTIVITIES IN THE CONTEXT OF 'PARTNERSHIP FOR PEACE' AND WE WILL LOOK INTO THOSE PLANS MORE SPECIFICALLY IN MY NEXT MEETING WITH MR. SECRETARY IN SPAIN NEXT SEPTEMBER, DURING A NATO MEETING THERE.

WE ALSO DISCUSSED ISSUES PERTAINING TO BILATERAL RELATIONS BETWEEN U.S. AND GREECE WITH REGARD TO MILITARY AID, AND ON THAT ISSUE WE HAD A USEFUL EXCHANGE OF VIEWS. I WOULD LIKE NOW TO TURN THE FLOOR TO THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, MR. PERRY, TO SAY A FEW WORDS.

SECRETARY PERRY: THANK YOU VERY MUCH MR. ARSENIS. I WOULD ADD ONLY TWO POINTS TO THE ONES MADE BY MINISTER. THE FIRST IS RELATIVE TO THE SITUATION IN BOSNIA. ONE OF THE PRINCIPAL REASONS I AM VISITING ATHENS IS BECAUSE I WANTED TO GET AN ASSESSMENT FROM THE GREEK LEADERS ON THE SITUATION IN BOSNIA TODAY AND IN PARTICULAR WHAT CAN BE DONE BY THE UNITED STATES, BY GREECE, BY THE COMMUNITY OF NATIONS TO BRING THAT WAR TO AN END OR, TO THE EXTENT THAT IS NOT IMMEDIATELY POSSIBLE, TO PREVENT THE SPREAD OF THAT CONFLICT.

WE HAD VERY USEFUL DISCUSSIONS ON THAT SUBJECT AND I VALUE GREATLY THE IDEAS OF THE GREEK LEADERS IN THAT REGARD. SECONDLY, AS THE MINISTER HAS INDICATED, WE HAD DETAILED DISCUSSIONS RELATIVE TO THE WAY GREECE AND THE UNITED STATES CAN WORK TOGETHER IN NATO AND IN PROMOTING THE 'PARTNERSHIP FOR PEACE'. WE BELIEVE THAT NOW, MORE THAN EVER, SOUTHEAST EUROPE PLAYS A VITAL ROLE IN THE SECURITY OF ALL OF EUROPE, AND THAT GREECE APPROPRIATELY TAKES THE

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LEADERSHIP ROLE IN NATO IN DEALING WITH THOSE PROBLEMS. WE AGREED THAT OUR TWO STAFFS WILL WORK CLOSELY TOGETHER TO ACCELERATE, OR AS WE SAY JUMP-START, PROGRESS ON THE 'PARTNERSHIP FOR PEACE,' IN PARTICULAR BY PLANNING TRAINING JOINT EXERCISES IN THE SOUTHERN REGION. AND WE ALSO AGREED THAT THE MILITARY COOPERATION AND ECONOMIC COOPERATION IN THIS AREA ARE MUTUALLY REINFORCING OF EACH OTHER. WE WILL BE HAPPY TO ENTERTAIN QUESTIONS AT THIS TIME.

QUESTION: THE "CONTACT GROUP" HAS KIND OF TAKEN CHARGE OF SOLVING THE SITUATION IN BOSNIA, UNITED STATES, RUSSIA, OTHER MAJOR COUNTRIES. BUT WHAT CAN BALKAN COUNTRIES, GREECE, WHAT CAN COUNTRIES OF THIS REGION DO CONCRETELY BESIDES SITTING ASIDE AND WISHING THAT THE BOSNIA CONFLICT WILL BE RESOLVED AND IN FACT OTHER POTENTIALLY EXPLOSIVE SITUATIONS IN THE BALKANS? WHAT CAN BE DONE AND IS BEING DONE CONCRETELY?

SECRETARY PERRY: CONCRETELY, GREECE AND OTHER NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES CAN INFLUENCE IN SEVERAL DIFFERENT WAYS. FIRST OF ALL, BY MAKING THEIR ASSESSMENT ADVICE VERY CLEAR TO THE MEMBERS OF THE "CONTACT GROUP" AND THIS MEETING TODAY AND LAST NIGHT WAS VERY VALUABLE IN THAT REGARD. SECONDLY, THROUGH THEIR ROLE AS MEMBERS OF NATO AND AS MEMBERS OF THE UNITED NATIONS. AND THIRD, TO THE EXTENT THEY CAN DIRECTLY INFLUENCE THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE WAR OF BOSNIA, BOTH THE SERBS AND THE MUSLIMS. DIFFERENT NEIGHBORS HAVE, IN MANY WAYS HAVE AN UNDERSTANDING AND AN INFLUENCE ON THOSE COUNTRIES BEYOND THAT THAT THE MEMBERS OF THE "CONTACT GROUP" HAVE.

QUESTION: AND MR. MINISTER, IF FOR EXAMPLE, IF GREECE CAN'T SOLVE ITS ONGOING PROBLEM WITH MACEDONIA, HOW CAN YOU EXPECT THE SITUATION IN THE BALKANS THEMSELVES, INCLUDING OTHER SUCH CONFLICTS, TO BE RESOLVED?

SECRETARY PERRY: I THINK GREECE HAS A DEEP UNDERSTANDING OF THE SECURITY ISSUES IN THE ENTIRE BALKAN REGION AND IN PARTICULAR IN THE FORMER YUGOSLAVIA. AND THEREFORE, I VALUE VERY MUCH THEIR ADVICE IN THAT REGARD. I MIGHT SAY THAT THE UNITED STATES HAS NOT SOLVED ALL OF THE SECURITY PROBLEMS WITH WHICH WE ARE CONFRONTED, BUT THAT IS NOT REASON THAT WE SHOULD NOT CONTINUE TO TRY TO ADDRESS PROBLEMS AS THEY COME TO US....

QUESTION: WOULD MINISTER ARSENIS LIKE TO COMMENT ON THAT?

MINISTER ARSENIS: I HAVE NOTHING TO ADD TO WHAT MR. PERRY SAID IN RESPONSE TO THE PREVIOUS QUESTION. I AGREE WITH WHAT MR. PERRY SAID.

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QUESTION: I HAVE A TWO-LEG QUESTION FOR MR. PERRY. MR. PERRY, YOU ARE VISITING TIRANA IMMEDIATELY AFTER ATHENS. AS YOU MAY KNOW, GREEKS LIVING THERE CONFRONT CERTAIN PROBLEMS. WE HAVE SOME VIOLATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS, SOME PERSECUTIONS OF GREEKS. WILL YOU RAISE THESE ISSUES TO THE ALBANIAN LEADERS? MY SECOND QUESTION IS WHETHER YOU SEE SOME NEW PROSPECTS FOR THE GREEK-AMERICAN RELATIONS AFTER YOUR CONTACTS WITH THE PRIME MINISTER AND THE MINISTER OF NATIONAL DEFENSE?

SECRETARY PERRY: I AM GOING TO TIRANA PRIMARILY FOR REASONS OF GETTING THERE AGAIN, DISCUSSING WITH THEM THE ISSUE IN THE BROADER BALKANS. BUT I FOUND IT VERY VALUABLE TO GET THE PERSPECTIVE OF GREEK GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS ON THE ONGOING BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GREECE AND ALBANIA, AND IN PARTICULAR THEIR PERSPECTIVE ON THE PROBLEMS OF THE GREEK MINORITIES IN ALBANIA. RELATIVE TO WHETHER THERE IS AN IMPROVEMENT IN THE GREEK- U.S. RELATIONSHIP AS A RESULT OF OUR DISCUSSIONS: I WOULD SAY, IN MY JUDGEMENT, THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE U.S. AND GREECE WAS EXCELLENT BEFORE I CAME HERE AND CONTINUES TO BE EXCELLENT. I THINK OUR DISCUSSIONS WERE VERY POSITIVE AND COULD ONLY STRENGTHEN THAT RELATIONSHIP.

QUESTION: MINISTER ARSENIS, YOU SAID YESTERDAY THAT DURING YOUR MEETING WITH YOUR AMERICAN COUNTERPART, NEW FOUNDATIONS WOULD BE LAID FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF COOPERATION BETWEEN GREECE AND THE U.S. I WOULD LIKE TO ASK YOU WHETHER AFTER YOUR MEETINGS, YOU BELIEVE THAT YOUR ASSESSMENTS HAVE COME TRUE?

MINISTER ARSENIS: YES, INDEED, THE DISCUSSIONS LIVED UP TO THE EXPECTATIONS. I LOOK FORWARD TO A CLOSE COOPERATION BETWEEN GREECE AND THE U.S., PRIMARILY IN THE CONTEXT OF 'PARTNERSHIP FOR PEACE,' AND I THINK THAT THERE IS TODAY A JOINT UNDERSTANDING THAT THE ISSUES OF COLLECTIVE SECURITY IN THE BALKANS ARE ISSUES THAT HAVE TO BE UPGRADED AMONG THE PRIORITIES OF NATO AND OTHER COUNTRIES. USUALLY, THE ISSUES 'PARTNERSHIP FOR PEACE' WERE ISSUES OF PRIORITY CONCERNING THE CENTRAL EUROPEAN COUNTRIES. TODAY, IT IS MADE EVEN CLEARER THAT ISSUES OF COOPERATION IN THE CONTEXT OF 'PARTNERSHIP FOR PEACE' HAVE A SPECIAL IMPORTANCE FOR THE PEACE OF THIS REGION. IN THIS FRAMEWORK, GREECE CANNOT BUT PLAY A PRINCIPAL, UPGRADED ROLE.

QUESTION: MINISTER ARSENIS, THE NEW ROLE THAT OUR COUNTRY IS ASKED UPON TO PLAY REQUIRES INCREASED DEFENSE EXPENDITURES. HOW DOES THE U.S. PLAN TO ADDRESS THIS ISSUE, CONSIDERING THAT GREECE HAS A DEFENSE-ECONOMIC DEBT TO THE UNITED STATES?

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SECRETARY PERRY: WE DISCUSSED THE ISSUE OF THE MILITARY DEBT OF GREECE TO THE UNITED STATES. THIS IS NOT AN ISSUE IN WHICH OUR DEFENSE DEPARTMENT HAS THE AUTHORITY TO ACT. ANY ACTION IN THIS REGARD WILL HAVE TO BE DONE BY OUR LEGISLATURE AND I FULLY UNDERSTAND AND FULLY SYMPATHIZE WITH ISSUES WHICH WERE DESCRIBED TO ME BY THE MINISTER AND THE IMPORTANCE OF GETTING THEM RESOLVED SO THAT THE MODERNIZATION PROGRAM CAN PROCEED FULLY. BUT I HAVE TO BE CLEAR ON THE POINT THAT I DO NOT HAVE THE AUTHORITY TO ACT ON THAT ISSUE. THIS IS AN ACTION WHICH IS REQUIRED BY THE U.S. CONGRESS. THANK YOU VERY MUCH.